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NOTES AND SUGGESTIONS

THE REFORM OF JOSIAH AND ITS SECULAR ASPECTS

THAT religion is the most important element in Hebrew history is a truism which none will dispute. That no element in this history has a value save in terms of religion is not a truism nor is it universally advocated, yet it is a fallacy underlying much of our biblical research. Thanks to the religious prestige of the Old Testament, its non-religious contents have directly influenced the history of later peoples along legal, political, and social lines. Without denying the supreme importance of the Hebrew religion, a fresh working over of the history from a purely secular standpoint has a distinct value of its own. Even the religion will be better understood when we more clearly realize the secular environment in which it developed.¹

An excellent illustration of the distortion caused by a purely religious standpoint is found in the Reform of Josiah.² Its date, 621 B. C., has come to be, in the eyes of modern biblical students, the central point in Hebrew history. The Book of the Law found at this time in the temple was undoubtedly the book of Deuteronomy.³

¹ This note is a by-product of studies which seek a new starting-point for the source-criticism of the Old Testament in an investigation of the passages added later than the earliest Greek translation. Cf. "Source Study and the Biblical Text", *Amer. Jour. Semitic Languages*, XXX. 1 ff.; "The Earliest Book of Kings", *ibid.*, XXXI. 169 ff.

² II Kings xxii f. The account has been much interpolated in late times, cf. *Amer. Jour. Semitic Languages*, XXXI. 190. For proof, note the use of the shorter and later form Hilkiah for Hilkiah in xxii. 8b-12; the three essential variants, with others of less importance, in the usually so fixed Massoretic Text; the numerous cases where even the late Greek translation of Theodotion has better readings than the Hebrew. The most important Hebrew variant, "Levites" for "Prophets", is another case of correction from Chronicles.

³ Or rather the core of Deuteronomy. Such passages as iv. 27 and xxviii. 36 ff., for example, are clearly post-exilic; omission from Greek manuscripts sometimes shows a post-Septuagintal date. That the original Deuteronomy was considerably shorter is also proved by a Hebrew papyrus fragment of pre-Massoretic character (S. A. Cook, *Proc. Soc. Biblical Archaeology*, XXV. 34 ff.; *Expository Times*, XIV. 200 ff.) which frequently gives us the originals of Greek variant readings, including one entire verse hitherto considered a Greek interpolation. It also proves that Deut. v. 22-vi. 3 is a late Hebrew insertion. We should especially note that in this interpolated passage we find a triple use of the phrase "commandment, statutes, ordinances", already known as the most characteristic expression of the sections added to Kings in post-Septuagintal times.

With its date thus fixed, we have a standard by which to judge, not only the age of the various documents in our Old Testament, but the entire religious and secular development of the earlier history.

Undoubtedly the code of law then introduced was better adapted to the more complex civilization, undoubtedly it marked a great advance in ethical feeling and a growing kindliness. Nor can we deny that centring the cult in Jerusalem did much to make more definite a monotheism already developing from the idea that no patriotic Hebrew could worship any god but Yahweh.

Yet we shall largely misunderstand this central event in Hebrew history if we neglect its secular aspect. Centralization of the cult in Jerusalem was only one phase of a political centralization which had long been in process of development. The tendency toward union had already appeared in the time of the Judges and reached its height under David. That astute ruler took for his capital Jerusalem, a foreign and therefore pagan city, with no Hebrew associations save those connected with himself. In this city, an upstart in the sight of old cult-centres like Hebron and Bethel, Solomon built his temple. If earlier generations of scholars over-emphasized its glory, those of the present day have minimized its very real importance. Small as it was, it was the royal chapel, attached to the king's palace,⁴ and always under the direct control of the ruler who could sacrifice in person, high priest and king in one.⁵ Changes in religion, whether approved by the editor of Kings or not, are always attributed to the monarch alone. The funds of the temple are always at his disposal.⁶ It is the ruler who checks cases of priestly peculation.⁷ Even as late as the time of Ahaz, the king inquired in person of Yahweh by means of a special altar in the temple.⁸

Added to this tendency toward centralization which resulted from the royal character of the shrine, an influence of a more purely secular character should be noted. Already David had endeavored to form a close union of the tribes and the rebellions of Absalom and of Sheba marked the reaction against it. Solomon attempted to destroy the old tribal divisions and to bring his subjects under royal officials directly controlled by the central power. The revolt of Jeroboam marked the end of this effort. But with the fall of the

⁴ Cf. I Kings vii; II Kings xi. 9.

⁵ I Kings ix. 25; II Chron. xxvi. 16.

⁶ I Kings xv. 18; II Kings xii. 18; xvi. 8; xviii. 15.

⁷ II Kings xii. 4 ff.; cf. xxii. 3 ff.

⁸ II Kings xvi. 15.—Does v. 18, "from the face of the king of Assyria", hide a reference to worship of the King of Assyria and of Ashur, the deified Assyrian nation, within the temple precincts?

northern kingdom, this tendency became again dominant in Judah.

It is true that, in certain respects, the reform represents the victory of the Jerusalem aristocracy over the country elements. It is true that the book of Deuteronomy contemplated a king who was by no means free from control by that priestly aristocracy.⁹ But, whatever the origin of the book, it is clear that the actual reform was the work of Josiah alone. It was the king's order to use priestly funds for temple repair, neglected by the religious authorities, which led to the "discovery" of the Law. It was the king who carried out such demands of the Law as he saw fit. If Yahweh was now supreme in the land, so was his vicegerent the king; if Jerusalem was now the unique centre of Yahweh worship, no less was it the sole capital of the Hebrews. It is no accident that Jeremiah, the most profoundly religious mind of the period, opposed the introduction of the Law in these words, "I spake not with your fathers . . . concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices"; "the false pen of the scribe hath wrought falsely."¹⁰

But the strongest argument against a purely religious character for the reform is its effect upon religion. That in the long run it was an aid to the monotheism rapidly developing among the higher classes is true, for a single sanctuary demanded a single deity. But there was another side. The country priests were not, to be sure, left entirely deserted. Those who wished might come up to Jerusalem, be supported at state expense, and sink into dependents of the priestly aristocracy. Few seem to have come.¹¹ The irregular priests of the Judæan high places were burned to death¹² while even more severe was the punishment meted out to the priests and high places at Bethel in the northern kingdom.¹³

Far worse was the condition of the peasant. So far as authority could secure that result, he had been robbed of his religion. It is only too true that this worship was far from ideal. "On every high hill and under every green tree" were performed those rites in which sexual impurity found a place, and there were abuses connected with the local shrines which had long since invited the thunders of the prophets. But all was not unclean. At Hebron and at Beersheba had lingered the traditions of a loved and glorious past, when Abraham had been the friend of Yahweh. If the worship of the national god Yahweh under the form of a calf at Bethel had

⁹ Deut. xvii. 14 ff.

¹⁰ Jer. vii. 22; viii. 8.

¹¹ II Kings xxiii. 9.

¹² So the Greek on xxiii. 15.

¹³ *Ibid.*, xxiii. 15 ff.

provoked the indignation of advanced thinkers, few could forget that here it was that the hero Jacob had seen the ladder. If the closing of the shrines at Hebron and Beersheba meant a complete break with the past, the desecration of the altar at Bethel by burning upon it human bones was pure sacrilege. To many a thinking and pious Hebrew, the "reform" of Josiah must have seemed the utter negation of all that was best in the nation's past.

Religion had been a vital part of the peasant's life. When he slaughtered a sheep, it was a sacrifice to Yahweh. When he ate his simple meal, Yahweh might be present with him. When he brought his first fruits to the local sanctuary, he "rejoiced before the face of Yahweh". The priests were of his own class. If his asses were lost, the local seer told him where they were, and the cost was not great. The "man of God", scarcely more than a wandering dervish, ate his simple fare and blessed him.

Now all was changed. His priests had been slaughtered, or were far away, dependents in the distant city. His first fruits were eaten by men he knew not face to face. Only in Jerusalem could he be religious. That meant an absence of days from home, a tramp on foot under the blazing sun and over the unspeakable trails of Judah, and expense which, however small, was too great for his modest means. Arrived in Jerusalem, he must worship with utter strangers. The union of the official religion with the social life of the village was broken and broken forever.

Soon after, Josiah was killed in battle and barely a third of a century elapsed before Jerusalem fell and the temple was destroyed. The little group of deported leaders, exiled in Mesopotamia or Babylonia, might look back with longing to the temple in Jerusalem which had been the centre of their power as well as of their affections. A few might even leave the fleshpots of Babylonia and go back to their desolated homes. The peasants who had not been deported had lost touch with the official religion. Connection had been destroyed by the "reform", there had been no time for the temple to take its place. The peasant became a "pagan", one of the "people of the land" as they were stigmatized by those who arrogated to themselves the name of "Pious".

When at last the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Mediterranean world had made clear, even to the most "Pious", the impossibility of confining worship to the little mountain city, and the synagogue had been developed to meet the need, the peasant was in large part alienated from the official religion. Some had married

Philistine women,¹⁴ some had mingled with the Assyrian captives and formed the Samaritan people,¹⁵ some had accepted the Hellenistic religions.¹⁶ The remainder were lukewarm in their faith and doubtful in their orthodoxy. Later, some became Christians and more became Muslims after the Conquest. To-day, they worship Allah in name, but the religion which influences their lives is the religion of their fathers, in no small part identical with that which Josiah and his advisers attempted to stamp out. That they were once called Hebrews, they never suspect. All opportunity for influence by the advanced thinkers among the Hebrews was lost when the "reform" of Josiah snapped the connection between the official cult and the daily life of the peasant.¹⁷

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JAMES I. AND WITCHCRAFT

THERE are several pieces of direct testimony that prove, beyond the possibility of doubt, that James I., throughout his English reign, prided himself on discovering imposture in cases of alleged bewitching or demoniacal possession.¹ To those that have already been cited, may now be added the evidence of John Gee, in a sermon at Paul's Cross in 1624.² Gee gives an account, which he has "learned within these few dayes", of a young woman in London "who pretendeth to be vexed and *possessed by a Devill*".³ He concludes his story with the significant remark: "I leave the examination of this to him that sits on our *Throne*, his *Maiestie*, who hath a happy gift in discovery of such *Impostures*."⁴

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¹⁴ Neh. xiii. 23 ff.

¹⁵ II Kings xvii. 24 ff.; Neh. xiii. 4 ff.

¹⁶ II Macc. iv. 7 ff.

¹⁷ Much of this paper is the direct result of days and nights spent among the peasants in their fields, on the road, and in their huts.

¹ *Studies in the History of Religions presented to Crawford Howell Toy* (New York, 1912), pp. 53-64.

² *Hold Fast: a Sermon Preached at Pauls Crosse upon Sunday being the XXXI. of October, Anno Domini 1624* (London, 1624).

³ P. 45.

⁴ P. 46.